



Professor John Croall
Bulletin Editor

Crunch time?

When I was a child growing up in the USA my favourite breakfast cereal for a time was *Cap'n Crunch*. I'd forgotten all about it (my teeth and dentist, alas, haven't) until the advent of the current credit crunch. Such a satisfying alliteration. Such an unpleasant event. So unpleasant that it has almost pushed global warming and terrorism off the news agenda. I hadn't quite grasped the seriousness of the depression until this weekend. I was talking to a relation who works in Social Security. Apparently *lawyers* are coming onto the shrinking job market as corporate and property sales grind to a halt. Lawyers being made redundant! That's new. And that's worrying.

The NHS is presumably not immune to the adverse financial environment we find ourselves in. But at least the demand is still there – the core business is expanding rather than contracting. Our population is ageing fast and the demands on healthcare can and will only increase. But will the funding rise to match that increase? Don't bank on it. Will the government have any money left?

While the NHS tries to control costs it is also placing increased costs on pathology. Screen all patients for MRSA! Now! Not exactly a cost-free request/demand. And microbiology labs across the country (well, England, anyway) are faced with this demand. Is it clinically justified? Is it even cost effective? Do it anyway. Screening all healthcare workers will be next I bet. There is now a fairly urgent demand for some way of automating MRSA screening – right now it is labour-intensive, tedious and expensive. Any inventors out there? I'm sure there are plenty more demands and initiatives pathology departments will have to rise to. The inexorable rise of demands for new MDTs is one. I think that we really are victims of our own success sometimes.

It's always interesting finding out why our colleagues went into pathology. On page 152 one junior doctor tells why she did. I hope she enjoys it at least as much as the rest of us have (most of the time anyway). However there may be a cloud on the horizon. We are training many histopathologists through the excellent training schools but medical workforce planning is not really that reliable. What if we produce an oversupply? Where will these excellent, well-trained doctors end up? Well the Credit Crunch may focus attention on the NHS pension – watch that space very carefully. Any revision on minimum retirement date could cause an exodus – if I had the choice of retiring at 56 or 65 I know which one I'd choose, and I don't

think I'd be alone. That should at least keep the job market fluid.

But there is another alternative – particularly for histopathologists. Australia! They've got a shortage, particularly in forensic pathology, it's a wonderful country and a career move there would be well worth considering. I found this out in December when I dropped in on the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia in Sydney. I'll have more to say about that visit and pathology down under in the next *Bulletin*.

Let's look at happier times. National Pathology Week 2008 continues to resonate through this issue with reports from up and down the land (pages 127–132). And our first steps into public education are bearing fruit (pages 138–140).

I particularly welcome Sue Armstrong's article (pages 144–145) – we review a lot of interesting books (pages 178–184) but it is not often we have an author telling us about how they came to write one. And if you feel the need to set up a temporary mortuary there's an article (pages 148–151) that tells you all you need to know.

Finally, there are some really plum College jobs on offer (page 156). Have a look. I fancy a few of them but I'll stick with this one at the moment.

Professor John Croall
Editor
publications@rcpath.org